

Born Again



• Roger Le Bel in *Un Zoo la nuit*

God Returns to Cannes

by Marc Gervais

Now here was a Cannes Festival really worth writing home about, a rampant success, even if you are wise and believe only half of what festival organizers tell you. Twenty-two thousand accredited film professionals, a thousand showings in one form/medium or another, meetings galore, tributes, exhibitions, explorations of cinema and opera which special commissioned films, special events, beautiful weather (except for the last two days), Prince Charles and Diana — who could ask for anything more of this, the fortieth anniversary of the world's greatest film festival?

There were other signs, too, maybe not quite so reassuring. This year again, one has to write that the Festival is succumbing even more alarmingly to elephantiasis. And it has become totally, but totally, dominated by TV. Take television at its most wretched, multiply by 10, reach for the surrealistic in TV vulgarity and inanity and you have Cannes '87, a spectacle now seemingly created by TV and for TV. Nothing is real and

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spontaneous. Actors and directors, their life squeezed out of them, appear as concocted products, mediated P.R. images. And while the judicious grieve, the public gawks on, apparently enraptured, certainly insatiable. Fittingly enough, the closing ceremonies, now watched by hundreds of millions on TV, reached an unbelievable low this year, a monument to abysmal ineptitude and lack of professionalism.

But Cannes will survive this, as it has survived every other catastrophe. Like every other year, in its official competition the Festival favoured — whether they deserved it or not — its own version of the 'Big Four': the U.S., Britain, France, and Italy. The other countries, however, as they too do every other year, found their way to screenings in all sorts of manifestations and market situations. Sad to say, Latin America, Africa, and even mammoth Asia attracted only marginal interest, an eloquent witness, if any were needed, to the western countries' world dominance in film.

Speaking of dominance, the dynamic cannon cousins, the irrepressible Menahem Golan and Yoram Globus, once again demonstrated that their old image as hustlers of movie garbage no longer applies. They are now hiring major directors and actors, promising 24

new films for next year, buying distribution rights for all kinds of films for all kinds of film territories — and showing off last year's products in (and out of) every major category at the Festival.

The quality of the films presented at Cannes '87 was the best in many years. Star directors? How about, for starters, films by Woody Allen, Robert Altman, Lindsay Anderson, Bruce Beresford, Fellini, Frears, Greenaway, Godard, Gunnell Lindblom, Marta Meszaros, Mikhalkov, Rosi, Scola, the Taviani brothers, Andrzej Wajda, Wim Wenders, and Bo Widerberg? To be sure not every one of their offerings was satisfying, but with that kind of lineup, how can you fail to score?

In the last decade or two, the Festival has been considered rewarding if one film or two proved exceptional. One, however, kept pining for the heady days, back in the '60s, when Cannes regularly meant, as the French delighted in putting it, some spectacular *révélation* — a radical direction, more glorious surprises from the 'old masters', exciting new national cinemas bursting with energy and urgency. Well, the good news, spelled out at the end of this report, is that this year there was indeed a revelation to match those of times past — one whose social/political/ideological/cultural/historical implications go beyond anything one might reasonably have expected.

Lining Up For Content

Heady stuff indeed. But before going into that, let it be noted that for Canadians, Cannes '87 offered another kind of revelation, one that had most Canucks smiling as I have not seen them smile in my 21 years of attendance at this festival. By now, presumably, the great success of *I've Heard the Mermaids Singing* and of *Un Zoo... la Nuit* has been well recorded in the Canadian media. At both the critical and popular levels, the films did extremely well in the major auxiliary section, the Directors' Fortnight (*La Quinzaine des réalisateurs*). What was especially encouraging for the Canadian film industry in general, and for the creators of these films in particular, were the amazingly speedy, concomitant, financial rewards. *Zoo* was sold immediately to many of the major territories, and *Mermaids* moved even more spectacularly: within a few days, every major territory, and more than 30 regions overall, were sold.

Nothing quite like this has ever been experienced by a Canadian film. And both directors (Jean-Claude Lauzon and Patricia Rozema), still reasonably young and fresh, found themselves hurtled into star status. Patricia, photogenic as all-get-out, suddenly found herself repeated on the other side of the lens, her photographs splashed all over the Croisette. It is not easy to sparkle 24 hours a day, but there was *la Rozema*, surely in a

daze, yet going through the rituals beautifully day after day, interview after interview, deal after deal. It was, to put it blandly, a delight to watch these young Canadians, far from the more mundane realities of their home bases in Toronto and Montreal, living out the Cannes dream — and contributing enormously to a positive, dynamic, bouncy Canadian image.

For it was the whole Canadian film industry that was benefitting. As Jean LeFebvre, head of the Festivals section for Telefilm Canada (which did its habitual superb job at Cannes) put it, the popularity of *Zoo* and of *Mermaids* had a catalytic effect on the sale of other Canadian products. If, for the first time, international distributors, exhibitors, buyers were actually lining up to purchase the rights to these two films, their awareness of other Canadian movies, and the concomitant willingness to risk, was growing by leaps and bounds (in Australian fashion, so to speak).

As a result, by all reports, other Canadian films were doing very well. Rock Demers, one of the major architects of Canada's new success, a success based on experience and professionalism, was reporting twice the amount of sales he had hoped for. *The Haunting of Hamilton High*, too, was reportedly doing very well. (Life has its little ironies — Bruce Pittman, *High's* affable director and long a *habitué* of the Festival and the elegant Petit Carlton, this year remained working on a new project in Toronto, victim to the new work ethic in Canadian film.)

This positive Canadian situation, however, was not created solely by *Zoo* and *Mermaid*. Both of the films contributed, but they are not the great Canadian masterpiece, neither one of them. *Zoo* smacks a wee bit of the Jean-Jacques-Benxix-style-over-substance school of aesthetics. But it is gloriously fresh, crazy, inventive, an aesthetic trip into film noir, absurdity, horror, while still managing to touch us with its story of the loving relationship between a son and his father.

Mermaid, on the other hand, is totally small, totally endearing, witty, charming, achieving exactly what it wants to achieve within the confines of a very small budget — and proving that all you need is mind and heart and knowhow. More importantly, perhaps, its pixillated heroine, wonderfully incarnated by Sheila McCarthy, may forever banish the cliché of the sad, introspective Canadian loser. In this, the Year of McCarthy in Canadian film and theatre (Sheila is also starring in *Cabaret* at Stratford, Ontario), Canada is looking more and more like a place where people are alive, where they actually can laugh and have fun, where it isn't all sociology and cold and psychology — even though, golly (and admittedly) life north of the U.S. can still be pretty rough.

So the Canadians, revitalized in image, showed signs of new life in real life as well. One of the great things about the Cannes Festival is that it furnishes the big international context from which to judge the Canadian film scene. And the sim-



• Sheila McCarthy — from *Mermaids* to Stardom at Cannes

ple fact is that the Canadian situation is now seen in positive terms; as well, the future is judged as promising. There were over 100 Canadian films available for viewing, perhaps 20 of them released since last year's Festival, and about 15 of them brand new. I am in no position to report on them, not having seen many, not having time, and so on; moreover, sales figures, always tricky to pin down, are simply not available at time of writing. Vitality and optimism, however, were the Canadian trademark this year, and non-Canadians everywhere were talking Canadian film. 1986's success at MIP (the TV Festival in Cannes in April) had already been repeated this year, with over \$5 million in sales and \$20 million in co-production accords. And now Canadian film was doing the same. 1986's success with *Le Déclin*, *Loyalties*, etc., was being repeated by *Zoo* and *Mermaids*.

— And so indeed the image has changed, two years in a row has done it. People seem to understand the Canadian situation. The vast sums (in excess of \$100 million) being invested by Telefilm Canada and various provincial bodies is seen as a truly successful venture, the cornerstone for Canadian film and TV production which is attracting substantial sums and responsible, knowledgeable activity from the private sector. As long as this situation lasts, and as long as the Canadian dollar remains so much cheaper than its U.S. counterpart, Canada, given its pool of talent, expertise, established cadres, and now relatively rationalized procedures, will continue to be immensely attractive as a filmmaking place.

Cannes knows that major Canadian production entities exist, with solid, long-range plans; that distribution and international selling is becoming more Canadian, with more investment in production from these Canadian entities; that co-production and co-financing arrangements with the U.S. and European or Asian partners are now far more feasible and equitable; that Canada has indeed worked out a system in which feature film and TV are working together, interdependent, as they do, *mutatis mutandis*, in, say, Britain, Italy, Germany,

Canada is seen as a beehive of activity and projects. Not only *Bethune*, for example, but a brand new Canada/Canada/France co-production, *Le Palanquin des Larmes*, had its publicist in Cannes to announce that it was moving ahead; so, too, Antonioni's next film will be shot in Toronto, Vancouver (and Rome's Cinecittà); and Canada has joined Italy, France, and the U.S. in filming *The Jeweller's Shop*, from a play by Poland's Karoly Wojtyla, also known as Pope John Paul II.

So the activity is seen as intense and widespread. And most encouragingly, there is a perception that even though Hollywood North will always be part of the reality of Canadian film and TV production, its worst excesses in terms of incompetence, ripoffs, and cultural abdication are a story of the past, and that indeed genuinely Canadian programming and films are now not only a possibility, but a growing fact of life.

It might be noted in passing here that Telefilm Canada's temptation to go American, to succumb to the formulas that guarantee big audiences and big bucks, is actively counteracted not only by forces within Telefilm itself — as well as by its own mandate — but also by at least some of the provincial bodies. La Société générale du cinéma du Québec has, since its inception, been identified with a policy of nurturing a culturally specific Quebec cinema, even if the Quebec scene is presently witnessing a slight shift from a director-dominated (*auteur*) cinema to a more producer-oriented one. In Ontario, where producers have, by and large, run the show in both film and TV production, Wayne Clarkson has steered the new Ontario Film Development Corporation into a policy whereby "two commercial movies" will be invested in, but all the rest of the money will go to more quality-oriented projects and the encouragement of young writers and directors... All of which points toward a well-balanced, reasonably healthy situation, one that augurs well for the foreseeable future.

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The New Australians

What is especially intriguing in all of this — and here one confesses to indulging a whit in wishful thinking and sheer speculation — is the shifting currents of English-language film production and the possibilities opening up. Could it be that Canadian film will become a viable alternative to American-style, American-recipe product in the vast English-speaking market, like the Australian film has been in the last 10 or dozen years? Amazingly, Canada replaced Australia this year in terms of splash, vitality, youthfulness. The Canadian parties (the big official one was probably the greatest collaborative achievement since Confederation began) were a resounding smash, and the Canadian doings were well publicized.

The Australians, who for some years seemed most adroit in exploiting the Festival's possibilities, were next to invisible: no leaps and bounds now, but more like dozing koala bears. Few films, little publicity, no fêtes — (Mel Gibson slipped in and out of Cannes unnoticed) — what has happened to the Australian film presence? I did see a splendid Aussie film, *Travelling North*, starring Leo McKern and Julia Blake, about an aging couple. Phillip Noyce's *Shadow of the Peacock*, with the usual excellent performance by Wendy Hughes, was also a fine flick — exotic, breathing the quality one has grown to expect in Australian product. But the few other Aussie features slipped by without furore.

It seems that someone back home in Canberra or Sydney or wherever has made a regrettable decision, based on lack of knowledge of the *raison d'être* of film festivals, which has given the impression that Australia is going through a loss (temporary?) of creative drive. Surely the latter is not the case? One thing for sure, however: in the absence of any sign of vitality, the Australian presence was the most muted I have experienced in Cannes in a decade. I fail to see how either Australia, or Cannes and the international scene, for that matter, have been well served by the change.

If Australia really does eschew the role of Great Alternative to Hollywood, then Britain may well assume that mantle, giving every sign of an ongoing filmic resurgence. British bounce was due not only to the huge British Pavilion, the visit by Charles and Diana, and a splendid tribute to Sir Alec Guinness. It was the British films — small, relatively inexpensive, clever, witty, slightly off-center, cynical, shocking, wicked, saucy, beautifully crafted, acted and written — that made of Britain one of the most exciting presences at this year's festival.

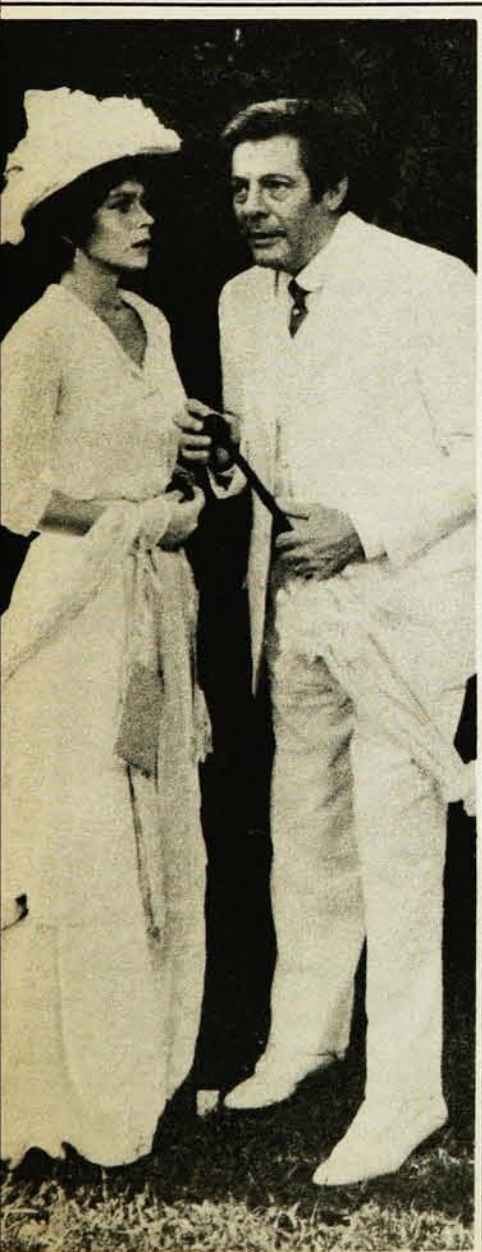
As in the last few years, the shadow of Channel Four (Film Four International) continues to loom large. Perhaps paradoxically, that alternative TV entity, by its judicious investments in specific film products, has become the most important element in British film, and indeed, by its enlightened policies, a benign in-

fluence on the international film scene as well. Channel Four had no less than 18 films at Cannes. The recent ones to watch for: Peter Greenaway's *The Belly of an Architect*, Stephen Frears' *Prick Up Your Ears* (both in the official competition), David Leland's *Wish You Were Here*, and Alan Clarke's *Rita Sue and Bob Too* (both in the *Quinzaine*). The Festival, in commemorating its Fortieth Anniversary, chose to create the *Prix Rossellini*, in honour of that great force in the history of film, precisely to reward "outstanding contribution to progress in film." No wonder that the first recipient became Britain's independent cultural network, Channel Four.

Canada cannot yet compete with this level of performance. But who knows, in the next few years, given the present rate of progression, the Aussies may have to make way, and even the Brits may be saying "Well done, Canada!"

Meanwhile, in late May, in Annecy's Animation Film Festival, Canada and Norman McLaren were being honoured for our prodigious contribution to this category of film creativity.

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• Black Eyes

National Cinemas

Cannes, however, is much more than any single country or group of countries. As always, the Festival offers an incomparable opportunity to see films from any number of places, films that are part of one or other of the official offerings of the Festival, or on their own, as it were, on the market. Especially if one is operating within a network of friendly acquaintances furnishing inside info gathered from many countries over the years, Cannes can be the source of many filmic delights. Produced from those privileged conditions, then, are the following bits and pieces, gleaned from (sometimes) judicious viewings.

Scandinavia was well represented this year with many films richly deserving international distribution. These relatively small countries continue to serve as splendid examples of states that refuse to impoverish their culture, insisting on financing quality films which in most instances cannot hope to recoup their costs, but which are considered essential to the maintenance of national culture.

Finland's *Shadows in Paradise* is a dry, sly, deromanticized love story, with a lot to say about Finnish society, directed by an outrageous iconoclast, Aki Kaurismäki.

Sweden had at least three impressive films at Cannes: Stefan Jarl's *Threat* delves deep into the tragedy of Swedish Lapland and the threat, after Chernobyl, of the extinction of the reindeer, and of a whole culture dependent on these animals; Bo Widerberg returns to his early form with *The Serpent's Way*, a beautiful, harsh, modernistic tale of social injustice in nineteenth-century Sweden; Gunnel Lindblom continues to assert herself as one of Sweden's leading directors in theatre and film. Also a major actress (she will soon take over the role of Gertrude in Ingmar Bergman's production of *Hamlet* at Stockholm's Royal Dramatic Theatre), Madame Lindblom's *Summer Nights* is a graceful film that — with intelligence and loveliness communicates a tragic sense of life's passages and problems — and love. It's the kind of study of human relationships that Swedes do so well.

The Norwegian husband-and-wife team of Vibeke Lökkeberg and Terje Kristiansen (she writes, directs and stars, he produces and does the cinematography) present a stunningly picturesque, tortured *Hud (The Wild One)*, a story of incest, at once angry, sympathetic, horrific.

Denmark offered a most unusual delight, Gabriel Axel's rendition of Isak Dinesen's *Babette's Feast*, featuring Stéphane Audran and the by-now elderly actors of Carl Dreyer's three last films (*Days of Wrath*, *Ondet*, *Gertrud*). Slow but mesmerizing, this tale of a repressed religious group is built on a rather special premise — God's grace works through French *haute cuisine*. *Feast* is a sly Dreyer pastiche, affectionate, and ultimately, immensely moving.

REPENTANCE

a film by Tengui ABOULADZE

with Avtandil MAKHARADZE Zeinab BOTZVADZE Ketevan ABOULADZE

{ SÉLECTION OFFICIELLE CANNES 1987 }

The Eastern European contries share Scandinavia's concern for and dedication to film qua national culture. Yugoslavia, for example, furnished an excellent, moving case study of a little known, yet horrible, phenomenon: 20,000 Gypsy children from Yugoslavia living in slavery, scattered over Europe. The great Andrzej Wajda, directing once again in Poland, returns to his early romantic, baroque style in *Chronicle of Love Affairs*, a minor work about desperate romantic youth in Poland on the eve of World War II. Minor Wajda is still mighty fine cinema. Marta Meszaros heads a very strong Hungarian output with her splendid *Diary for My Loves*, the second part of her autobiography told in film, this segment centering on how she became a filmmaker. Through this superb movie, one of the finest shown in Cannes, Madame Meszaros is retelling the recent history of Hungary with insight, courage, and amazing freedom. And she strengthens her position as possibly the world's finest woman film director.

The United States had numerous films featured in every facet of the festival. *Radio Days*, Woody Allen in a minor key, but still probably the best U.S. film in Cannes, was complemented by Paul Newman's sincere tribute to Tennessee Williams and to his wife Joanna Woodard's acting performance in a very straight rendition, really a recording, of *The Glass Menagerie*. The Soviet's An-

drei Konchalevsky continues his American films for Cannon with a stunningly photographed, but rather ludicrous, swamp movie, *Shy People*, almost redeemed by Barbara Hershey's acting. At the other end of the scale, the Petrie sisters, Ann and Jeanette, received encouraging response to their generous, committed documentary, *Mother Teresa*.

Probably the most fascinating and moving U.S. experience, however, was directed by Britain's Lindsay Anderson, and starred film elders Lillian Gish, Bette Davis, and Vincent Price. A lovely film about old age and dying, set in Maine, *The Whales of August* rests solidly on the magnificent Miss Gish. Scoffing at the report that she is 91, Lillian pointed out that she is, in fact, only 87. The only reason she seems to have been around so long is because she was only 12 years old when D. W. Griffith first directed her 75 years ago — a living, gracious, marvelous history of Hollywood right there.

France, the host country, continued its recent pattern of failing to impress. Jean-Paul Denis did present a charming, gentle, ironic historical tale, *Field of Honour*. Jean-Luc Godard, Shakespeare, the Cannon boys, and Norman Mailer (sort of, for a while) got together for a Godardian exercise in film language dialectics, with rather predictable results. *King Lear* it was said to be, but of course Shakespeare would share with 99% of the audience in sheer befuddlement as to what on earth is going on — a few of the

remaining 1% would no doubt express intellectual delight. Godard's other contribution, a short segment from a kind of compilation opera video (*Aria*) proved a far more intriguing experience. And finally, of course, Maurice Pialat did win the *grand prix* for his *Sous le soleil de Satan*, a decision that elicited almost universal outrage (as we shall see below).

So who dominated Cannes '87 — I think I would rate the British as No. 1, were it not for the Italians, and were it not for the by-now-oft-promised *révélation du festival* that this article relentlessly is headed into. Ettore Scola's *The Family* is one of that strong director's finest efforts, rich and funny, human and sad, with a memorable, modulated performance by a giant of film history, Vittorio Gassman. Marcello Mastroianni, on the other hand, is simply magnificent in a brilliant Italian co-production, *Dark Eyes*, but that film really belongs to the Soviet Union. The Taviani brothers, Paolo and Vittorio, give us a delightful vignette of early Hollywood, D. W. Griffith and all, in *Good Morning Babylon*, their own loving tribute to filmmaking, a tragic-comic fairy tale, operatic, slightly schizoid, romantic, shot through with modern film techniques — in other words, a Taviani film, and deserving of a far better reception than that afforded at Cannes.

Then there was Fellini, in his best film in years (and years). *Federico Fellini Intervista* (Interview) *should* be a minor film, one of those rambling, self-indulgent, whatever-strikes-Fellini's-fancy things. But it is so right, so effortlessly flowing, so wise, perceptive, funny and sad that everyone fell in love with it — a wonderful film experience, well deserving the special 40-year-anniversary award especially created for it. Starring Federico Fellini himself, with a few great moments from his alter ego, Marcello Mastroianni.

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A Search for Meaning — (Give Me Religion or Give Me Death)

Even though one is aware that one's viewing is partial, that no batch of films at a single festival can pretend to stand for an entire world's film production, still, Cannes, by its very immensity and by the fact that it tends to have first choice in presenting the quality films from each country, does enable the critic to spot trends, developments, an evolution in this or that direction. And so, can anything be concluded from this year's offering?

Last year, *Cinema Canada* titled my Cannes report "God Goes to Cannes" — possibly very flattering, but probably it was because of the unusual presence of overtly religious films, and the amazing prizewinning performances of three of them — *The Sacrifice*, *The Mission* and *Thérèse*. Well, the trend seems to be continuing.

The top award this year, as mentioned, went to Maurice Pialat's *Sous le soleil de Satan* (*Under Satan's Sun*), a film rendition of Georges Bernanos' religious novel; the second prize (Grand Prix Spécial du Jury) to a Georgian (U.S.S.R.) film, *Repentance*, that cries out for a return to religion; and the third prize (Prix du Jury) was split between two movies, one, *Shinran Path to Purity*, by the Japanese Rentaro Mikuni, in which a man progresses along Buddha's route to perfection, the other *Yeelen*, by Souleymane Cissé of Mali, about a similar experience dealing with African deities. Wim Wenders received the Best Director award for his *Wings of Desire*, the main character of which is an Angel, contemplating Berlin in all its tragic desire for happiness. Last year, as dutifully reported in *Cinema Canada*, I quoted the night porter in my hotel reflecting on Festival developments by quoting André Malraux; and this year, it was Wenders' turn to repeat the same quotation: "The twenty-first century will be religious, or it will simply not exist."

One hesitates to draw categorical conclusions from relatively few films. Pialat's movie, for example, proved most unpopular, many accusing it, precisely, of destroying the religious inspiration in Bernanos' novel. Certainly, one senses in all of these films an awareness of the irony, the deep ambivalence of the culture in which we live. Nonetheless, the quality cinema in evidence at Cannes seemed to be reflecting profound changes in attitudes and ways of looking at reality.

Violence is on the decline, apparently even in the outrightly commercial films on the market. Sharp ideological positions and materialistic solutions are no longer in evidence, especially in the cinema of Eastern Europe. Everywhere the way of life is co-productions, but these, too, reflect a change in attitude. What we were encountering in Cannes, whether in the serious or the comic mode, were thoughtful, probing films about life, memory, death, a search for meaning, a reverencing for natural and loving human relationships. Watching these films, one certainly felt that here is a world searching for peace, for a way to live in harmony, and for a wisdom that will permit us to make sense of it all.

By comparison, need it be added, the cinema dominating North American screens seems trivial, if not downright loutish, belonging to another world, hopefully outdated.

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Back to the U.S.S.R.

All of which might be more than enough for any world film festival; enough, I would say, to guarantee this year's edition as the finest of recent times. But Cannes '87 was to be even more than that. Indeed, another *révélation* was in store for anyone willing to look and listen. Cannes was to reveal to the film world that the U.S.S.R., once a

great movie power, was back in business.

I have been watching the performance of the Soviets at world film festivals for the last 25 years. Especially in the last dozen or 15 years, that performance has been mostly pathetic, a testament to stupid bureaucratic repression — so much talent and technical resources, with, usually, so little spirit and creative *élan*. And yet we kept hearing reports that there was indeed another cinema in the U.S.S.R., managing to exist marginally in spite of everything.

Well, Cannes '87 certainly proved this to be true, and more. The most brilliant film, aesthetically speaking, of the entire Festival surely was *Oci Ciornie* (*Dark Eyes*), a joyous, funny, lyrical celebration of life and human frailty, an Italian/Russian co-production, Chekov seen through Fellini via Marcello Mastroianni, but all of it very much the personal creation of Nikita Mikhalkov. Nikita, younger brother of Andrei Konchalovski (who now works mostly for Cannon, out of Hollywood, while still retaining Soviet citizenship), has to be rated among the very best in the world, his early promise more than fulfilled. Not for Nikita the great profound questions doggedly pursued, nor ideological concerns, but rather nuance and satire, theatre and playfulness, insight and warmth, and all of it at the service of a delightful and profound rendering of the human comedy.

Dark Eyes appeared early in the Festival, a sure bet, I felt, for the *grand prix*. But then towards the end, came the shocker, the stunner, a movie that had us wondering whether what we were seeing and hearing could really be coming from the U.S.S.R. That film, *Repentance*, directed by Tengiz Abouladze, indeed was made in the Soviet Union, in 1984 in the Republic of Georgia — which furnished seven of the 13 Soviet films presented in Cannes. *Repentance* is a huge, sprawling, poetic work, a symbolic history, really, of the Soviet Union in the last 50 years — and the most scathing denunciation of the regime I have ever seen, going far beyond anything even from Czechoslovakia in 67/68, or Poland in the heady days of Solidarity. Through a surrealistic mixture of satire, comedy, and tragedy, *Repentance* viciously denounces Stalinism, and then dares go beyond, to the central issue today: what about the aftermath, the repression of human rights? The film is an operatic plea for humanity and freedom, it affirms the supremacy of art and religion over bureaucratic materialism; and in so doing it testifies to extraordinary goings-on within the Soviet Union.

Given its quality, and above all its far-reaching implications, I feel that *Repentance* was clearly the *grand prix* winner, even over the remarkable *Dark Eyes*. However, this was Cannes — my interpretation is based on conversation with East Europeans and others, including Russians — and the old political game called the tunc, the Soviets themselves being divided. *Dark Eyes*, direc-

ted by a Nikita Mikhalkov long favoured, it is claimed, by the pre-Gorbachev Party elite, was the choice of the Old Guard Soviets at Cannes, whereas the Gorbachev *Glasnost* people, representing a whole new attitude, would obviously favour *Repentance*. In true Cannes style, then, a solution was arrived at: give both films important prizes, but *not* the main one which instead went to a vastly less impressive *French* movie, Pialat's *Sous le soleil de Satan*. And so the fury unleashed by the ludicrous decision, and reported by the world press.

Howsoever that may be, this Cannes Festival certainly did belong to the U.S.S.R. The Republic of Georgia, for example, garnered another award, this one for the best first film, *My English Grand-Father*, by Nana Djordjadze, a witty, funny, irreverent story about an Englishman building a telegraph line in Georgia in 1920. Konstantin Lopouchansky's *The Dead Man's Letters* gave us a poetic elegy to a dead earth after the nuclear holocaust. A documentary about Soviet youngsters, Juri Podniek's *Is It Easy To Be Young* proved stunning in its frankness and openness, as these kids expose their critical attitudes concerning Russian involvement in Afghanistan, etc... Add to that a rather remarkable film that won the top prize at the Berlin Festival only a few months ago and that is now running in Paris, Gleb Panfilov's *The Theme* and you get the impression that the Soviet cinema makes most of the West's output look pretty trivial.

Some of these films date back a few years, more or less suppressed until recently. But now, in the U.S.S.R., matters do seem to have changed; thousands of prints of *Repentance* for example, have been released and the film is a runaway success, eliciting an intense, often agonizing debate.

What all of this may mean in the broader context of international relationships and indeed of world history, one hesitates to predict, inhibited by prior history, cynicism, our own brainwashing and ignorance, our knowledge of the fragility of the situation, but also moved by a hope that *Glasnost* is indeed a reality. Certainly these films have gone further than even the most surprising words and gestures emanating of late from Gorbachev's Soviet Union. The West still is unable to understand the profound changes that have been going on for 10 years in China. So how can we understand what is going on right now in what we have been told is the enemy, the U.S.S.R.?

As one Czechoslovakian expatriate put it, the world may be in for a huge wave of remarkable Soviet films. All the years of repression meant the damming up of talent, and stories, experiences, sentiments, bursting to be communicated. Now all of this energy may be released. That world cinema will benefit is clear; but the gains for humanity could well prove immeasurably greater. Big thoughts, these — and who knows? Cannes '87 at least gives us signs of a hope undreamed of even one short year ago.